

**Speech by His Excellency Mr Lubomir Reháč, Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to the Court of St James's,**

**Reception to celebrate faith communities and inter-faith dialogue**

**Embassy of Slovakia, London W8  
16 January 2020.**

Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, Your Eminence, My Lords, Ministers, Reverend Fathers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour and pleasure co-hosting tonight at our Embassy so many great people. People of good will, generous hearts and profound faith. Faith leaders and activists having of our deep appreciation and respect. Fellow members of the Constantinian Order of St George, renown for promoting the high ideals of faith, peace, charity, compassion and understanding in the world.

The President of Slovakia Mrs. Zuzana Čaputová at her New Year's audience with representatives of religious and faith communities last week made an interesting comparison: religions, she quoted, are like various colours on a lampshade. We look at the light inside of a lamp from various angles, through different colours. For me, she said, it is an image of unity in diversity of approaches. Assisting people in experiencing a proximity of God is a great mission of religions, contributing though it to acceptance of universal values. Values that are endangered by ideologists of hatred, intolerance, animosity or chauvinism.

Saint Pope John Paul II appealed to us with evangelical: nolite timere – do not be afraid. We must unite our forces, use the strength of belief, ideals of good and confraternity to face and challenge these negative phenomenons of today.

Diplomacy is, naturally fully supportive to this noble endeavour. The European Union, (and this country is still a full-fledged EU member for next 2 weeks), has a position of the Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the EU, occupied during the last 4 years by Slovak politician and diplomat Ján Figel'. Individual diplomats can do a lot as well. I have found encoded the strive for peace even in my name. Slavic name Lubomír means what I have transformed to my family's motto – *pacis diligens*, devoted

to peace. And indeed, humble personal contributions to peace and understanding among the nations are accompanying all my professional career.

This Embassy has always been opened for good ideas (Good Idea Slovakia is our official branding now). Our activities, quite naturally, have sometimes a religious component, reflecting our traditions and identity. Not only today's reception is an example of it, but also events like Advent wreath making for Ambassadors and High Commissioners and their spouses that my wife Dana has hosted for several years together with the Christian Embassy, not limiting its participants just to Christians.

This Embassy cooperates also with the Slovak Catholic Mission in London – we have its chaplain Father Tibor Borovský here today. Next week on 21st January at 1pm we organize a New Year's concert of Slovak Christmas Carols at St. Martin in the Fields with excellent singers from Slovakia.

Commemorating the Holocaust, that so tragically affected my country, we will present an exhibition at the Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue next Friday 24<sup>th</sup> January at 6pm. The exhibition, a part of which is displayed here exclusively for you today, discovers an unknown story of one Councillor of the City of Bratislava Aron Grünhut, who in 1939 rescued over 1300 Jews from wartime Slovakia and Austria. He rented two ships for taking refugees to the Holy Land. His own son, among other ten Jewish children from Slovakia was rescued by Sir Nicholas Winton in his Kindertransports to the UK. By all this we strive to join efforts, aimed at a world that is better, peaceful, prosperous and respectful.

May I conclude with my sincere wishes of a peaceful, blessed and prosperous New Year to all of you, to this country, all other countries here represented and to all people of good will.

I now would like to pass the floor to Anthony Bailey OBE and in doing so offer him my personal congratulations of his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday and to thank him for his long track record of promoting inter-religious understanding and harmony across Europe and the wider world.